

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7404

INFO AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT OF SPAIN 0375

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB PINS ENRG TD

SUBJECT: TEXACO LABOR NEGOTIATIONS LEAD TO TENSIONS --
COMING WEEK CRITICAL

SUMMARY: EXPIRATION OF TEXACO LABOR CONTRACT FEB 17 AND MILITANT
STANCE OF OWTU MAKES NEXT FEW DAYS CRITICAL IF MAJOR LABOR
CONFRONTATION WITH SERIOUS POLITICAL OVERTONES IS TO BE AVOIDED.
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY CONSIDERING POSSIBLE STATE OF
EMERGENCY AND REQUEST TO PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS TO ACCELERATE
HIS RETURN FROM OVERSEAS TRAVELS. END SUMMARY.

1. STALEMATED NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN GEORGE WEEKES' OILFIELD WORKERS
TRADE UNION (OWTU) AND TEXACO TRINIDAD FOR A NEW THREE-YEAR LABOR
CONTRACT ARE LEADING TO INCREASED TENSIONS WHICH
SHOW SIGNS OF WORRYING TRINIDAD GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.
PRESENT CONTRACT EXPIRES FEB 17.

2. I HAVE BEEN INFORMED BY A HIGH TRINIDAD GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL
THAT TEXACO WISHED TO SHUT DOWN ITS 350,000 BPD REFINERY AND OTHER
OPERATIONS IN THE FACE OF UNION HARASSMENT UNTIL SOME SETTLEMENT
IS REACHED, BUT THAT GOTT HAS PERSUADED TEXACO TO TRY TO CONTINUE
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OPERATING SO THAT OWTU CANNOT CLAIM A LOCK-OUT.

3. NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN UNDERWAY SPORADICALLY SINCE NOVEMBER 1974 WITH ORIGINAL AIM OF SIGNING NEW THREE-YEAR CONTRACT BY CHRISTMAS. ON THE EVE OF FORMAL CONTRACT EXPIRATION, HOWEVER, BOTH TEXACO AND UNTION ARE STILL FAR APART IN THEIR OFFERS AND DEMANDS. WE HAVE BEEN HEARING RUMOURS THAT OWTU MIGHT TRY TO CALL OUT VARIOUS SECTORS OF ECONOMY ON SYMPATHY STRIKES IN EFFORT TO BRING PRESSURE ON TEXACO AND GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY AFTER PRE-LENTEN CARNIVAL ENDED FEB 11. THUS FAR, THIS HAS NOT OCCURRED, BUT GOVERNMENT SOURCES STATE THAT NEGOTIATING SESSION FEB 18 WILL BE CRITICAL ONE IF A MAJOR LABOR CONFRONTATION IS TO BE AVOIDED. FOR LAST COUPLE OF WEEKS THE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE BEEN MOVED FROM TEXACO TRINIDAD'S HEADQUARTERS TO PORT OF SPAIN AND THE GOTT MINISTRY OF LABOR HAS BEEN TAKING AN ACTIVE ROLE IN TRYING TO BRING THE TWO SIDES TOGETHER.

4. OWTU PREACHES TO ITS MEMBERSHIP THAT GOTT IS THE PAWN OF LARGE MULTI-NATIONAL CORPORATION TEXACO. WAY IS THEREFORE PAVED FOR ANY CONFRONTATION TO BECOME POLITICAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC AS INDEED IT ALMOST WOULD IN ANY CASE IF OWTU STRIKES TEXACO AND TAKES OUT ELECTRIC POWER WORKERS (WHICH IT CONTROLS) ON A SYMPATHY STRIKE.

5. I ALSO UNDERSTAND ON EXCELLENT AUTHORITY THAT DEEP CONSIDERATION WAS BEING GIVEN SATURDAY FEB 15 BY ACTING PRIME MINISTER PREVATT TO HAVE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE MAHABIR REMAIN IN TRINIDAD AND NOT DEPART TODAY TO JOIN PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS IN THE UNITED STATES, SINCE SO MANY OF TOP OFFICIALS ARE GOING TO BE ABSENT THIS CRITICAL COMING WEEK. AT THIS WRITING, WE ARE UNSURE WHETHER MAHABIR DID OR DID NOT PROCEED THIS MORNING.

6. WE UNDERSTAND THAT DEFINITE CONSIDERATION IS ALSO BEING GIVEN BY THE GOTT TO DECLARING A STATE OF EMERGENCY LATER THIS WEEK IF SITUATION DETERIORATES, AND ASKING THAT PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS ACCELERATE HIS RETURN FROM ABROAD.

7. COMMENT: WHILE THE SITUATION HAS NOT YET BECOME QUITE AS SERIOUS AS ABOVE PROSPECTS INFER, THE NEXT FEW DAYS ARE OBVIOUSLY CRITICAL
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AND IF A RADICAL CONFRONTATION DOES ENSUE, THE DECLARATION OF A STATE OF EMERGENCY MAY QUICKLY FOLLOW, PARTICULARLY SINCE THOSE OFFICIALS ON THE SCENE ARE SOMEWHAT NERVOUS AT THE ABSENCE FROM TRINIDAD OF PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS AND SEVERAL OTHER SENIOR MEMBERS OF THE CABINET, PARTICULARLY MAHABIR AND CHAMBERS.
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